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ABSTRACT

This pilot study sought to investigate the possibility that college student satisfaction and dissatisfaction were not opposites and to provide a framework for considering the relationships between satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and motivation. The guiding model for the study was Herzberg's two-factor theory of organizational psychology. Conducted at a research institute in the Midwest, and using critical incidents methodology, the study asked participants to reflect on their college experiences, choose specific circumstances that gave them satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and then describe the situation in a way that made it clear what was satisfying or unsatisfying. The sample population consisted of 30 students enrolled in an introduction to psychology class in the spring of 1998. The results suggest that when students expressed satisfaction with their college experiences, these situations seemed to be centered around involvement and contact with people. When students expressed dissatisfaction, the situations involved their perceptions of unfair treatment and difficulties in maneuvering through bureaucratic academic and university systems. The paper suggests that these data can increase awareness of institutions of the relationship between motivation, satisfaction, and persistence. (Contains 18 references.) (CH)

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Is Satisfying College Students the same as Decreasing Their Dissatisfaction?

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Decreasing Student Dissatisfaction May Not Lead to Satisfaction

Abstract

Many institutions endeavor to be responsive to the areas of student dissatisfaction in an effort to increase satisfaction. But what if the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction? What if the causes and outcomes of each were different? If these two are not on a continuum, how would that affect the data collection and interpretation that institutional researchers engage in? Using Herzberg's model, this study looks at the ramifications of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as parallel factors. It provides a framework for considering the relationships between satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and motivation.

Is Satisfying College Students the Same as Decreasing Their Dissatisfaction?

The pressures of knowing relevant information to assist decision-making have caused colleges and universities to survey, interview, and question students about a wide range of information and experiences. As competition for quality students among institutions increases, students satisfaction and persistence have become key issues. Colleges and universities endeavor to be responsive to student dissatisfaction in an effort to increase their satisfaction. They also utilize student satisfaction responses to better understand institutional effectiveness. But what if the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction? What if the determinants of each were different? Satisfaction scales assume that levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction complete a full spectrum of a single construct. If these are two separate constructs and not on a continuum, how would that affect the data collection and interpretation in which institutional researchers engage? This research investigates this possibility and seeks to begin discussion on the ramifications of a two-factor model of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Literature Review

In the process of reading literature on student satisfaction and persistence, I noticed that an anomaly occurred with some regularity. Although this anomaly was identified by authors, they offered no explanation for its existence. Before elaborating on these anomalies, I will first digress and explain the "lens" through which I viewed this literature.

Guiding Model for Review

Herzberg 's (1987a) two factor theory comes out of the organizational psychology literature and was developed as a theory of motivation and its relationship to job satisfaction. From data gathered in the business sector, Herzberg

gathered data suggested that there were two factors associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction that he labeled hygiene and motivators. He used the labels hygiene and motivators because they expressed the function of the factors.

Hygiene variables related to working conditions, wages, job status, company policies, and supervisors. Herzberg claimed that these variables are essentially associated with pain avoidance, which is found in the lower levels of hierarchical theories of motivation. They are short term in nature, have an escalating zero point, and have no motivating capabilities. This theory suggests that in the workplace dissatisfaction results when these basic needs are not adequately met . But, if these needs are met, they reduce the dissatisfaction only for a time.

Motivator variables affect the levels of satisfaction. They include personal achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement in competence, and psychological growth. Over and over, Herzberg drummed the importance of separating the motivators from the hygienes (Herzberg, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c), depending on whether one is examining satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He said that you don't want to make the mistake of trying to motivate through the use of hygienes. Real motivation comes from within a person. Herzberg clarified that employers cannot offer motivation, but they can provide the conditions for the employees to achieve so they will become motivated.

Herzberg suggested that hygiene factors are preconditions for job satisfaction which is similar to the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although workers cannot be satisfied by having hygiene factors met, unfulfilled hygiene factors can prevent workers from being satisfied. Motivators can only satisfy workers when their hygiene needs are fulfilled.

This study suggests that the college experience could be thought of in these

same ways. The basic principles of this theory would be: 1) Students are satisfied through intrinsic and motivating factors, and 2) Improving issues underlying dissatisfaction will decrease the dissatisfaction but it will not necessarily result in satisfaction or have a motivating affect on students.

A New Perspective

If this is valid, then the way that student data has been interpreted needs to be adjusted. What if colleges and universities would look at the data they gather with these two factors in mind? Consider what is available in the data files of institutions. The theories and methodology of collecting these data on college students have been influenced by years of research. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) literature review across twenty years of studies focused on what changes occur while students are in college. When considering these areas of change, it is reasonable to ask how satisfaction and motivation of students affect change?

Many studies have delved into identifying variables that contribute to a better understanding of persistence to graduation, retention, and attrition (Cabrera et al., 1992; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Ethington, 1990; Kaufman & Creamer, 1991; Krotseng, 1992). In all of them are internal issues that contribute to the persistence of students. They include: academic self-concept, degree aspirations, goals, desire for recognition, and expectations for success. These internal issues fit into the definition of motivators. While extrinsic variables, especially financial, can create a reason that students cannot attend an institution, they do not motivate the student to persist, although they do alleviate critical situations. This more accurately describes a hygiene factor.

To rethink what it means to have two factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction is important because it can affect the interpretation given to statistics. Colleges often focus on hygiene issues, assuming that satisfaction/dissatisfaction are linear and a

single factor. Typically, they seek to measure this by using satisfaction surveys to discover what is satisfactory and dissatisfactory about the institution. In response to survey results, they allocate money to improve the campus, adjust the hours of the bookstore, improve the library technology, and increase scholarships for students. They assume that these types of measures will increase enrollment and lower attrition. Using a two factor model, as these hygiene issues are improved, the dissatisfaction goes down, but that does not necessarily motivate students to do well, persist, or improve their satisfaction. Institutions could begin to look at both of these factors and glean the information that is appropriate from each.

Ethington's (1990) study showed that students will persist when they set goals and work toward them, are responsible, achieve, and are valued and recognized. Herzberg's theory would add that students persist because these are factors which both motivate and create satisfaction. According to Herzberg, institutions cannot motivate directly, although they can offer the opportunities for achievement, responsibility, and recognition to take place.

The ecological dissonance theory (Miller, D.I., Burton, B., Geisen, M., Topping, J.S., & Reagan, C., 1990) identified environmental variables that can cause dissonance and found that an early sign of ecological dissonance is dissatisfaction. The purpose of their study was to use an equal opportunity measure as an indicator of ecological dissonance and as a predictor of dissatisfaction with one's academic major, alienation from one's major, and involvement in one's major. Although they used a single construct of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, their results split into three factors. One contained the negative or dissatisfaction items and the other two contained the positive or satisfaction items. Is it possible that this environmental dissonance that they referred to is actually the dissatisfaction with hygiene variables?

When listening to a presentation recently of a longitudinal study of student satisfaction (Bauer, 1997), the author expressed a mild quandary about some of the results. It seems that initial satisfaction surveys produced a list of items about which students were dissatisfied. The institution made efforts to address these items. On the next survey, students did not express dissatisfaction with these items anymore, and yet the level of satisfaction with the institution had not improved. The items that had been improved would fall under the category of hygiene. It is this type of curiosity that has led me to propose a study using the two factor theory of motivation/ satisfaction and hygiene/dissatisfaction.

Research Question

This study sought to investigate the possibility that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposites. From a neutral standpoint, the initial question is "Are there differences in the way college students describe their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their college experience?" Because this is investigative, a secondary question asks, "If there are differences, what are they?"

Conceptual Model

For purposes of this study, I define satisfaction as the expression of pleasure or pride with the college experience. I define dissatisfaction as the expression of malcontent and unhappiness with the college experience. This study did not use a conceptual framework as a structure by which to collect data. Categories were not created a priori, fitting the responses into those categories. Nor was a survey instrument used that was based on a two-factor model. But, this study does use a conceptual model to think through the descriptive results. This model utilizes Herzberg's two factor model for job satisfaction and motivation, transferring these concepts to a college student experience (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Two Factor Model of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

MOTIVATORS	
personal achievement	
recognition	
connections	
responsibility	SATISFACTION
advancement in competence	
psychological growth	
campus pride	
HYGIENE	
living conditions	
costs	
bureaucracy	
rules	DISSATISFACTION
systems	
class related processes	

Methods

Using a theory that has only been examined in the realm of job satisfaction and motivation requires the transferability of the concept. Because of this, I chose to go back to Herzberg's initial study and replicate his data gathering methods. This is a qualitative, descriptive, pilot study conducted at a Research I institution in the Midwest using critical incidents methodology. This method asks participants to reflect on their college experiences, choose specific situations that serve as examples of circumstances that gave them satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their college experience, and then describe that situation so it is clear about what they are satisfied or dissatisfied.

Sample

A sample of convenience was used for this initial study. In the spring of 1998, a total of thirty students were enlisted from an Introduction to Psychology class and some student employees. About half of the sample were first year students, and the other half was almost evenly distributed among sophomores, juniors, and seniors. I waited until the last week of the term to collect the data so that the first year students would have a complete year on campus upon which to reflect. A future collection of critical incidents is planned with a larger sample distributed across more of the upperclassmen.

Data Collection

Students were given six blank 3x5 cards and instructed to label three of them "Satisfaction" and the other three "Dissatisfaction". They were asked to use these cards to record specific incidents that illustrate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their college experience. Although this was vague, I did not give examples of what I wanted them to write because I did not want to lead them in any way. But I suggested that the satisfaction or dissatisfaction was with regard to the institution and their experience while attending college. The responses on these cards were totally anonymous and participants were assured that I would make no attempt to identify them. It was obvious by some of the responses that there were those who went off on their own type of reflection which resulted in five unusable responses.

Results

The results of this data collection are descriptive. The cards were divided and sorted into groupings and I used descriptive labels for each group that seemed to make sense (See Table 1). The satisfaction response seemed quite solidly connected around themes. The dissatisfaction groupings, however, were quite diverse.

Table 1

Types of Situations that Give Students Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction.

Category	Satisfaction %	Dissatisfaction %
Helpful/Accommodating/Connecting	42%	
Co-Curricular Opportunities	14%	
Campus Pride	11%	6%
Campus Resources	9%	2%
People Opportunities	8%	
Personal Achievement	6%	2%
Convenience	6%	16%
Personal Preferences	2%	
Responsiveness	1%	4%
Unfair/unreasonable		19%
Housing		13%
Advising		8%
Bureaucracy		7%
Diversity Issues		6%
Costs		4%
Library System		4%
Sexism		1%
Miscellaneous		9%

N = 30
Satisfaction: Total usable responses = 85
Dissatisfaction: Total usable responses = 90

Most of the categories are self-explanatory except the two categories that accounted for the greatest percent response. The largest group (42%) of satisfaction responses was labeled "Helpful/ Accommodating/Connecting". In this category, students described situations in which people took time to help and make things go well for them. They included professors, graduate student instructors, advisors, and staff that made a difference for students because they were accommodating, understanding, engaging or challenging in their teaching style, and basically connected with students because of their willingness to take time for them.

A group labeled "Unfair/Unreasonable" contained 19% of the dissatisfaction responses. In this category, students described situations in which professors and graduate student instructors were unreasonable in their expectations regarding classroom procedures, class size or class schedule, and difficulty or length of assignments and testing, as well as quality of instruction.

Discussion

The results of this pilot study seem to suggest that there are differences in the way students describe their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. From Table 1, it is evident that although the responses describing satisfaction and dissatisfaction held some commonalities, a unique set of categories created the majority of the percent for each. When students expressed satisfaction in their college experience they referred to situations that seem to be qualitatively different from their expression of dissatisfaction. The things that gave them pleasure and pride centered around situations which Astin (1984) called involvement, Tinto (1987) called integration, and Pace (1990) called quality of effort. Contact with people was a predominant feature, but the situations contained more than just contact. Students wrote about valuable connections that involved people who took time for them. These situations also

showed a definite quality of involvement with university.

The response cards for dissatisfaction were very different. Students expressed displeasure and malcontent with a wide range of situations that, in their opinion, disrupted their ability to live comfortably, be treated fairly, and maneuver successfully through the "bureaucratic" academic and university system. Although a few of these situations included people, the focus was mostly on the barrier which they caused.

These results suggest the possibility of two factors. While this information alone provides no conclusive answers, it opens a discussion and calls for further study. The discussion that this raises surrounds the way in which institutions respond to student dissatisfaction. Based on the assumption that satisfied student do well and persist, institutions want to know what will increase students' satisfaction.

According to this two-factor model, making efforts to decrease dissatisfaction is important and may be necessary for students to be able to take full advantage of their college experience, but this only satisfies half of the equation for satisfaction. This model would suggest that students need to have their basic living and student related needs met first, and then if the institution creates an environment that provides opportunity for involvement, integration, and connection, then students will express satisfaction. Acknowledging that this study did not pursue the relationship between motivation and satisfaction, future studies might investigate this area to maximize the institution's ability to develop a culture that nurtures intrinsic motivation.

At the very least, these data can increase the awareness of institutional researchers regarding expectations surrounding issues of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The ability of an institution to respond effectively to students is important. Understanding the ways in which students might attribute their

satisfaction differently from dissatisfaction could be beneficial. Keeping these thoughts of a two constructs close at hand might assist to explain other results also. If the hygiene factors are necessary, then perhaps they need to considered at the same time as institutions create programs to help integrate and motivate students.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include Herzberg's research itself. Critics cite research methodological failings as well as disregard for alternative explanations among a variety of other reasons as flaws in Herzberg's studies. (House & Wigdor as cited in Northcraft & Neale, 1990, pg 141). In an effort to address some of Herzberg's critics, I do not maintain that these results might not be explained by other theories, but I do intend to throw this model into the "ring" of possible explanations. Another limitation of this study is the small, pilot study sample size and the use of only one rater. Any future work in this area must include multiple raters, a larger sample, and perhaps multiple institutions.

Conclusions

This study asks more questions than it was designed to answer because it was intended to raise issues and begin discussion regarding student satisfaction and motivation. It can potentially affect the way institutions approach these issues and may assist in better understanding the relationships between student satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In addition, it provides a helpful model for reviewing the information that exists in data files at all colleges and universities.

The descriptive results from this pilot study support further investigation. "Do satisfaction and dissatisfaction have separate determinants?" In subsequent research, consideration must be given to researching the unique determinants and outcomes of each factor as well as further definition of these constructs.

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